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At the recent 21st Congress of the Communist Party of Russia, First Secretary Khrushchev delivered a lengthy oration in which he painted a picture of the future that awaits Russia. He spoke in such glowing terms that he appeared to be talking about a newly discovered Utopia.

His description of the industrial and economic future that awaits his country in a few short years was so optimistic and so far removed from reality, as shown by centuries of experience, that one can only conclude that he was forced to talk in this vein because of continuing opposition to his rule.

In the past few months information has leaked out through the Iron Curtain censorship indicating that behind the facade of seeming calm there is considerable latent opposition to Khrushchev and his policies. Just how strong this opposition is cannot be known exactly, but that it is there is shown by the repeated castigation in the Soviet press of the so-called "anti-Party faction," of which Molotov is a leading member. It was, therefore, apparently very much in Khrushchev's interest to strengthen his backing in the country by every means possible to silence his critics.

He said, for instance, that the USSR national income--which, as he asserted, is the most complete index and real basis of the increase in the standard of living of the working people under socialism--will rise, under the new Seven Year Plan, by a staggering 62 to 65 per cent by 1965, and will be almost six times higher than the level of the pre-war year of 1940. Naturally, he was careful not to mention that this new Plan had been introduced because the Five Year Plan it replaces had proved to be such an unworkable economic failure.

At all events, according to Khrushchev, everything is going to be for the best in the best of worlds. Wages are going to be increased and prices lowered and everybody's requirements are going to be met, not only by means of higher wages, but also through public funds, the role and importance of which will go on rising, he said.

Khrushchev pointed out that together with the fulfillment of the Seven Year Plan, the amount of funds accumulated by socialist enterprises will continue to grow steadily. This will finally become the only source that will ensure larger-scale socialist production and further improvement in the standard of living. He asserted that as a result it would soon be possible to give up levying taxes of any kind on the people.

And this was not all. The Communist Party, its leader said, has already considered that one of its program tasks is to struggle for a shortening of the work day. The shorter working day, will, apparently through some sort of secret economic legerdemain, be achieved in Russia by an increase in wages and not a decrease as one might suppose. In effect, Khrushchev said, the USSR is going to have the shortest work week in the world along with improved living standards.

Words are easily spoken, but to have any intrinsic value they have to be measured against reality. The truly sensational advances promised by Khrushchev undoubtedly had a great emotional impact on his listeners and made them feel that their destiny is in the hands of a solid man. A calmer and more common sense approach to his speech will tell anyone possessing a modicum of understanding of economics that such fantastic industrial and economic advances are hardly in the realm of possibility within the framework of the modern, highly complex industrial society in which we live.

Censorship restrictions prevent us from obtaining a clear picture of what is happening in Russia. However, Communist Czechoslovakia affords us an indication of the conditions within the Communist Bloc. There, the truth would seem to indicate that far from being able to anticipate Utopia, the worker can expect nothing but higher work norms, lower wages and less freedom, Khrushchev's promises notwithstanding.

In Czechoslovakia, the most highly industrialized of the satellite nations, the regime is initiating moves to raise the work norms, slash bonuses and clamp a tighter disciplinary grip on the worker. This has understandably led to a great deal of discontent and there have been disturbances in a number of plants throughout the country. Although the regime is determined to carry out its plan, it will doubtlessly have to proceed with a certain amount of caution if it does not want to stir up trouble among the usually docile and hard-working Czechs.

Probably the most unpopular measure affecting labor taken since the 1953 currency reform has been the wage reform plan which is to be introduced over the next two years. The regime sees in this plan the possibility of decreasing production costs and of increasing production. The Czech worker, however, sees in the move nothing but a scheme either to increase work norms without compensation or to cut wages. This hardly sounds like an introduction to the shortest work week in the world and the higher wages Khrushchev was boasting about at the Congress.

The Czechoslovak farmers are not any happier than the industrial workers. All they have to look forward to at the moment is the virtual completion of collectivization, the elimination of the system of privately-owned plots of land, the seizure of their cattle and a reduction of their wages. Although they have not protested too strongly against collectivization, they have not been persuaded to increase production and there is every prospect of a serious tightening up on the farmer in the near future.

In recent weeks there have been a number of indications that the Kremlin is not satisfied with the way things are going in Czechoslovakia and a number of measures have been introduced presaging a sterner attitude on the part of the regime. In accordance with one of them, workers will henceforth be held financially liable for losses on the job caused by negligence, theft or failure to fill the norms.

Items published in the Czechoslovak press reveal that so-called political crimes are being punished with much greater severity than in the past two years and last year's purge of the bureaucracy has, this year, been extended to the plants. At the same time the slim remnants of private professional practice are being speedily eliminated while the movies, TV, radio and theater have been ordered to inject more politics into their productions.

All this is the heavy price Czechoslovakia must pay for the dubious honor of being the most advanced industrial state among the satellites, for the regime is determined that the country cannot be permitted to abandon its role as the industrial show window of Central European Communism.

The problem the Prague regime now faces is to decide just how hard the Czechoslovak horse can be driven, and this is now a very delicate matter in view of the disturbances in the plants. As already pointed out, the nation has been a notoriously docile one throughout history and movements of revolt have been very rare. This makes the disturbances all the more surprising and are a good indication of the degree of discontent the worker must be harboring against the new harsh measures. Unless the government is willing to slacken its pace, there is a good possibility of more trouble to come.